



Handwritten notes in the top left corner:  
11.2.1  
7A  
67.1  
L8  
M86  
1954

CORNELL  
UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY



THE  
WORDSWORTH COLLECTION

THIS BOOK IS THE GIFT OF

GAYLAMOUNT  
PAMPHLET BINDER  
Manufactured by  
GAYLORD BROS. Inc.  
Syracuse, N. Y.  
Stockton, Calif.

*Shap Fells*

# Shap Fells

BY

JOHN MORTIMER.

REPRINTED FROM THE "MANCHESTER QUARTERLY,"  
*April 1904.*

SHERRATT AND HUGHES  
LONDON AND MANCHESTER  
1904.

CORNELL  
UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

11.27  
7/1  
67.  
L1  
m  
19

10.10.100-1

5.10

1.1

11.8.6

1.2.10.6

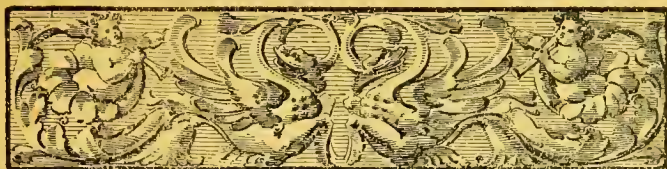
~~66~~

~~17.5.8.15~~

~~17.8.9~~

A889160

LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY  
CAMBRIDGE



## SHAP FELLS.

AN AUTUMN MEMORY.

By JOHN MORTIMER

TO the Quietist and myself the English Lakeland was, in our more pronounced pedestrian days, a more frequented paradise than it has been in the intervening years. It was one of our early loves, and though we have since wandered far and wide, in other directions, it still possesses that charm of association with old delights which will never fade as long as memory holds. We were familiar with its valleys, and we called its mountains by their names. In that period of youthful enthusiasm, before the heyday in the blood grew tame, the loftiest summits had an irresistible attraction for our restless roaming feet, but we don't climb mountains nowadays, finding it more in accordance with the gravity of years to seek our pleasure among lower elevations. So it happened in the autumn of the present year that our choice for a little holiday fell upon a strip of country on the Lakeland border, extending northward between Kendal and Penrith, and eastward, from the mountains which guard Haweswater, and Ulleswater, to Appleby, with the beautiful valley of the Eden lying between. It is a country displaying every variety of landscape picturesqueness from wild, untamed grandeur, through varying degrees to the softest and sweetest expressions of pastoral loveliness; a



country, withal, watered by many streams and with quaint old towns and villages scattered over it, and rich, too, in associations with border romance and chivalry, with its ruined castles, baronial halls, and other forms of fortified homesteads, reminiscent of ancient feuds, and raids, and forays.

Over this delectable land we wandered at our own sweet will, gaining many experiences, which cannot all be set down here. Sometimes the sun shone, but oftener the rain rained upon us, but we were never unhappy, so that from these blended influences there has come a kind of rainbow radiance in the retrospect. Recalling those September days, as I sit by a December fire, many impressions come back to the mind, but those which detach themselves from the others most readily are centred about Shap, the village standing high up among the fells, and known, if not otherwise, to every traveller who passes by rail that way, as a place of bleak exposure, whose inhabitants are largely interested in the quarrying of granite. It is known, in a more intimate way, by pedestrians, and seekers of the picturesque, and at least one novelist has shown that he was well acquainted with it, and its surroundings. At my elbow, as I write, is a copy of Anthony Trollope's story, "Can you forgive Her?" and turning to a chapter therein, on "The Inn at Shap," I come upon these words: "There is a station at Shap, by which the railway company no doubt conceives that it has conferred on that somewhat rough and remote locality all the advantages of refined civilization, but I doubt whether the Shappites have been thankful for the favour. The landlord at the inn, for one, is not thankful. Shap had been a place owing all such life as it had possessed to coaching and posting. It had been a stage on the high road from Lancaster to Carlisle, and though it lay high and bleak among the fells, and was

a cold, windy, thinly-populated place—filling all travellers with thankfulness that they had not been made Shappites,—nevertheless it had its glory in its coaching and posting. I have no doubt that there are men and women who look back with a fond regret to the palmy days of Shap.” Trollope, notwithstanding, I imagine that to many travellers Shap is an acceptable place, for, to those who require it, the air is bracing there, and has not that modern guide-book writer, Mr. Baddeley, drawn attention to it as an excellent starting point for a walking tour in the Lake District?

It was at the “Greyhound,” an old hostelry near the station, and on the great north road, that the Quietist and I found comfortable and congenial quarters during our three or four days sojourn at Shap. Our inn, with old dates to be found carved on it without and within, had been a busy place in the coaching days, of which there seemed still a remaining as well as a reminiscent flavour, in the post-horses and carriages still obtainable there. It was interesting, too, in view of some modern forms of travelling, to learn from our landlady that this year, there had come that way more pedestrians of the knapsack order than for some time past. Good old knapsack! companion of one’s youth one would be sorry to see you fall into absolute neglect or disuse.

From the “Greyhound,” with shady trees on the bit of greensward across the way, the grey village straggles northward, in an intermittent and desultory fashion, for a considerable distance, and, from various open spaces on the left of it, you get views of the outlying mountains looming largely beyond the nearer walled pastures, and the intervening undulations of the fells. Swindale lies below there and to the right of it is Haweswater, hidden from sight in its mountain-guarded recess. It was for the

new experience of approaching Haweswater from this side that we had mainly come to Shap. Near upon five and thirty years had elapsed since I looked upon it last, and the occasion was a memorable one. As to an undiscovered region, I started out alone to explore it, on an autumn afternoon, in that year long gone by. Gaily strapping my knapsack on my back at the railway station at Staveley, I took my way along the Kentmere valley to the head of it and so to the pass of Nan Bield beyond, which gives access to the remote valley where Mardale lies. Night had come on when I reached the summit of the pass, and I had met with an accident in crossing a stone wall which left me a limping pilgrim in a darkened and unknown land. The mountains rose up all about the valley, giving it an air of majestic gloom. Harter Fell, with its wild precipices, towered above on the right, on the left were the crags above Blea Tarn, and the ridges of High Street. Below, far down in weird indistinctness, like "the misty mid-region of Weir," lay Small Water Tarn, with its rocky shore, and the shadows of the mountains reflected in its sombre depths. Viewed in that mysterious light which rests on the edge of dark, there was an awe-inspiring grandeur about the scene, which I have never forgotten. How, in the increasing darkness I descended painfully, and with doubtful steps as to my destination, down that rugged slope, and how when I had reached more level ground, when least expected, a light shone across the way, and I found myself safely at the "Dun Bull" at Mardale, I must not set down in detail here; neither must I tell of that further journey on the morrow, when, through the mist, I limped over High Street to the pass of Kirkstone, and so to Ambleside and to ultimate ease and rest.

It was but a partial view of the head waters of the lake that one got on that occasion, but it was an impressive



one, in the circumstances, and had remained a vivid mental picture. Now we were to approach it in a securer fashion, and make a more leisurely survey. Meanwhile Shap Abbey had to be visited, with a little loitering there among its shattered walls, dominated by the lofty ruined tower, which, with the grass-carpeted pavements, are all that remain of a once beautiful edifice, standing by the swirling stream, at the edge of the fallow-featured fell pastures. Thence by devious ways, that lead downwards from Shap village, we traversed the intervening miles, passing through Bampton, the village with its church clustered there by the Lowther side, just then in spate and with its water overflowing the banks. The foothills and mountain slopes that rise about Haweswater were now in immediate evidence, and entering thereupon we passed, on the left, the considerable homestead known as Thornthwaite Hall, where we had touch again with Anthony Trollope. This house, a little withdrawn from the roadway, and near the foot of the lake, is said to be the Vavasour Hall of the novel already referred to. The novelist knew this country well and has reflected it vividly in his book, but one has some difficulty, topographically, in reconciling the locality of the hall with some of the scenes and stirring incidents with which it is associated.

Haweswater is one of the neglected beauties among lakes; it is Ullswater repeated on a smaller scale, with wooded slopes where the trees come down to the water's edge, and bare summits, and, at the upper end, lofty mountains, which impart to it a certain wild grandeur of environment. Along the road which skirts the lake we walked, picking raspberries from the little cane-jungles by the wayside, and having strange old memories stirred within us by the sight of the parsley fern, and the wall rue cropping out from the stone fences, until a storm of

wind and rain, accompanied by remote reverberations of thunder in the mountains, drove us back to Shap along the way we had come. It was along these roads where the mud is sticky and glutinous, that Trollope describes a villain of his story walking to the same destination as ourselves, in darkness, wind and rain. Says the novelist, introducing here an autobiographic note, "Wearily and wretchedly he plodded on. A man may be very weary in such a walk as that and yet be by no means wretched. Tired, hungry, cold, wet, and nearly penniless, I have sat me down and slept among these mountain tracks—have slept because nature refused to allow longer wakefulness. But my heart has been as light as my purse, and there has been something in the air of the hills that made me buoyant and happy in the midst of my weariness."

From our comfortable inn we sallied forth in other directions, but the most memorable of these walks was the one which took us over the fells to Kendal, sixteen miles away, on a grey, wet, and stormy day. The road is carried high over those desolate spaces with their vast undulations stretching out to remote distances. In any condition of weather these fells have a fascination for me which I should find it difficult to explain, save in some lines I met with somewhere, in which the poet says:—

I love all waste  
And solitary places, where we taste  
The pleasure of believing what we see  
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be.

On the way we met flocks of white-fleeced sheep being driven marketwards by their shepherds, with attendant dogs to keep the inevitable stragglers within the line of march. This was not to be done without much bleating and barking, for it is of the nature of sheep to break

bounds and go astray; we say so when in church we make confession, and liken ourselves to them in this errant disposition. When these had gone on their way and we had reached a more lonely and exposed part of the road we caught sight of a pedestrian moving towards us slowly and like one who was footsore. He was comparatively a young man, and as he approached us it was evident that he was not a tramp, but undoubtedly a poor traveller who, in his attire, showed that he had seen better days. He would have passed on, but a question regarding the way that lay before us brought him to a halt. A curiosity as to the purpose of his travelling led to a further conversation and to the telling how he had once been a bank clerk in a far-off city, but had gone wrong; how his friends had sent him to an American ranch, but to no good purpose, and how he was now making his way back to his native place, in a worse plight than he had left it. With a frank confession, confirmed by his looks, he said that he had been sorely and deservedly punished for his misdoings, and had suffered greatly during the last few days. Not in the way of excuse, but as indicating some defect in nature he remarked: "I come of people who are either very good or very bad." In accepting a modest offer of assistance which had to be pressed upon him, he said he neither looked for nor expected any such help, and in parting, as though to emphasise his sense of his own unworthiness, his last words were: "I assure you it is a very undeserving case."

Undeserving from his point of view the case might be, but I should be slow to believe that it was by any means hopeless, in view of such evident self-upbraiding, and so sitting by a December fire at the season whose spirit is that of peace and goodwill to men, one has kindly and hopeful thoughts for that poor wayfarer, who finds his

place in that wide charity which Tennyson expresses when he says:—

Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt and taints of blood;

. . . . .

I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last—far off— at last, to all  
And every winter change to spring.







